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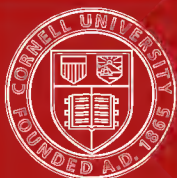
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THE PRIZE OF LIFE

SIR WILFRED GRENFELL

Wilfred Grenfell



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THE PRIZE OF LIFE



THE PRIZE OF LIFE

BY
WILFRED T. GRENFELL, M.D.



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THE PRIZE OF LIFE

THE PRIZE OF LIFE

PART I

THE WHY OF LIFE

I HAVE just been talking to the sailor of the "Carmania," who last voyage dived overboard in the night, in so heavy a sea that already over a hundred lives had been lost trying to launch the lifeboats. He did this just in order to save a poor immigrant.

"Why did you take the risk?" I asked. "Did any one suggest it to you?"

"Oh, no," he replied, "but I am a good swimmer, and I couldn't let the poor beggar perish under my eyes."

"Was he the only man in the water?"

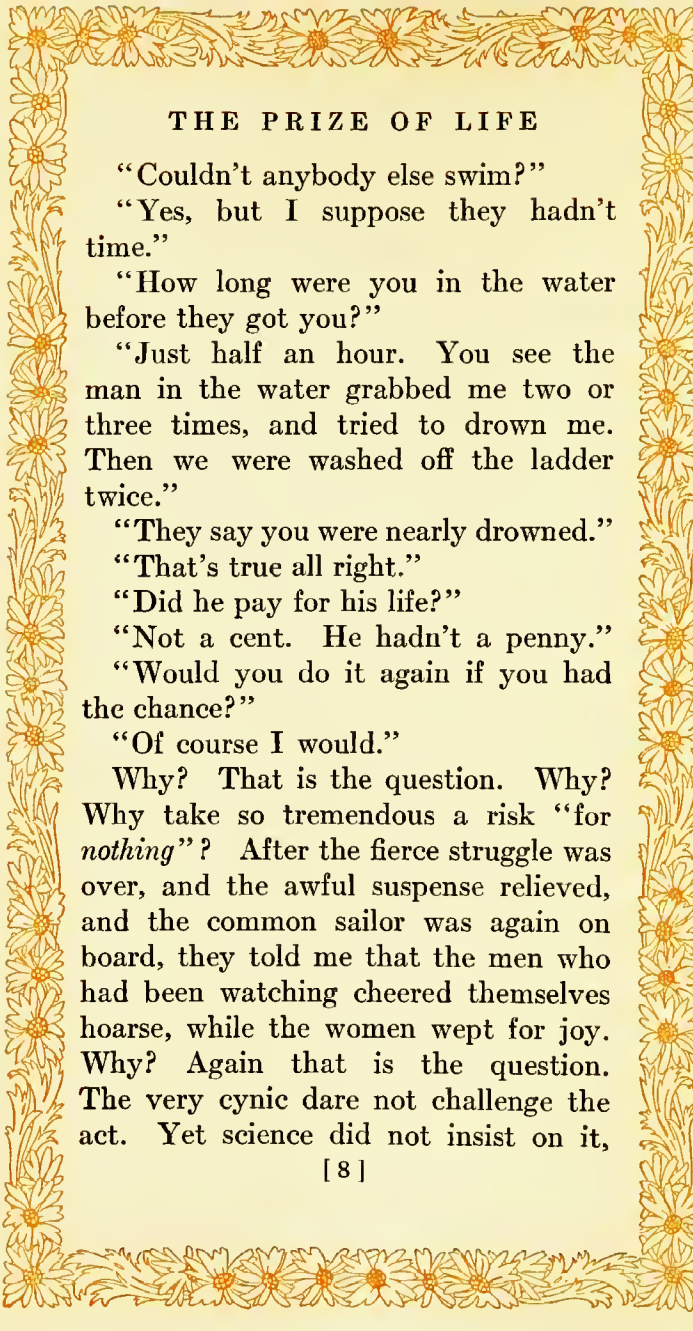
"No, they told me there was another fellow forward."

"Didn't anybody go after him?"

"No."

"What happened to him then?"

"Well, he was dashed against the side of the ship and killed."



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"Couldn't anybody else swim?"

"Yes, but I suppose they hadn't time."

"How long were you in the water before they got you?"

"Just half an hour. You see the man in the water grabbed me two or three times, and tried to drown me. Then we were washed off the ladder twice."

"They say you were nearly drowned."

"That's true all right."

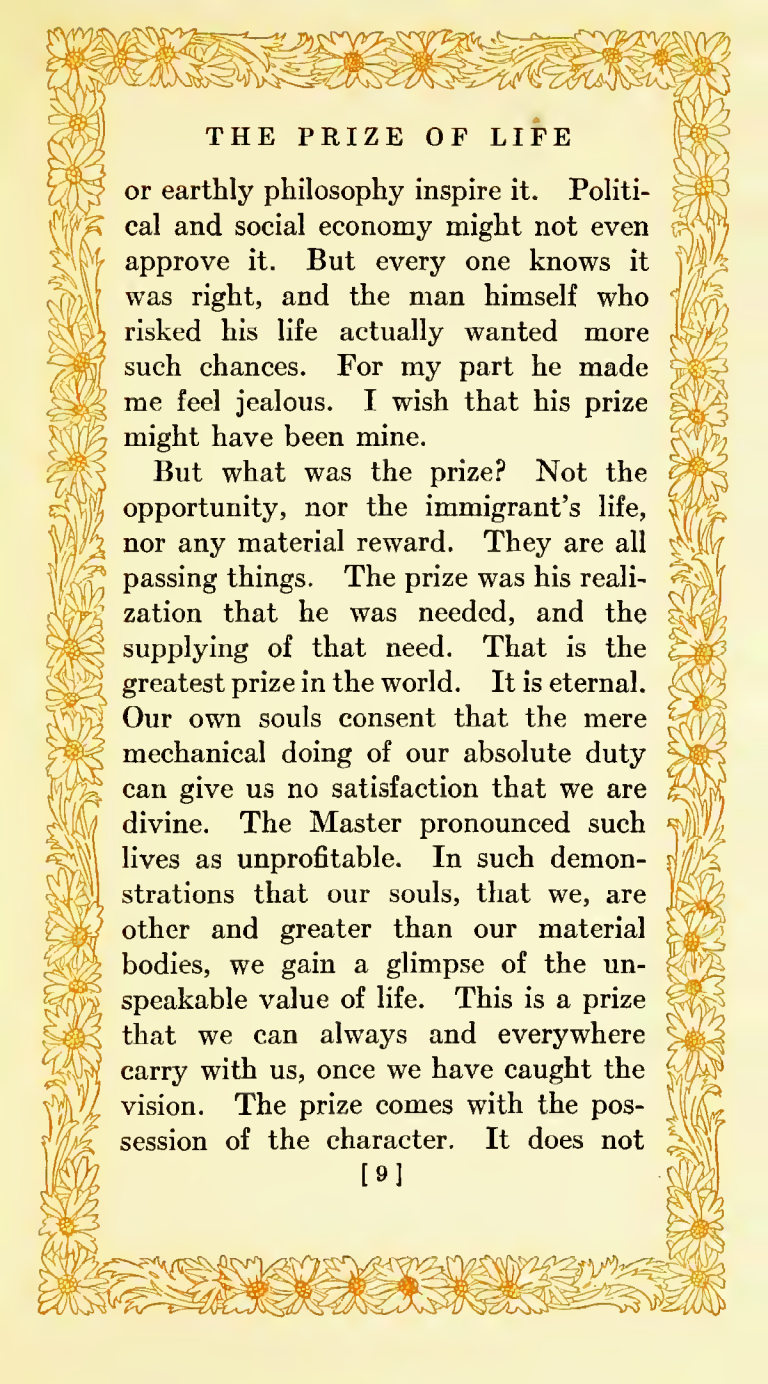
"Did he pay for his life?"

"Not a cent. He hadn't a penny."

"Would you do it again if you had the chance?"

"Of course I would."

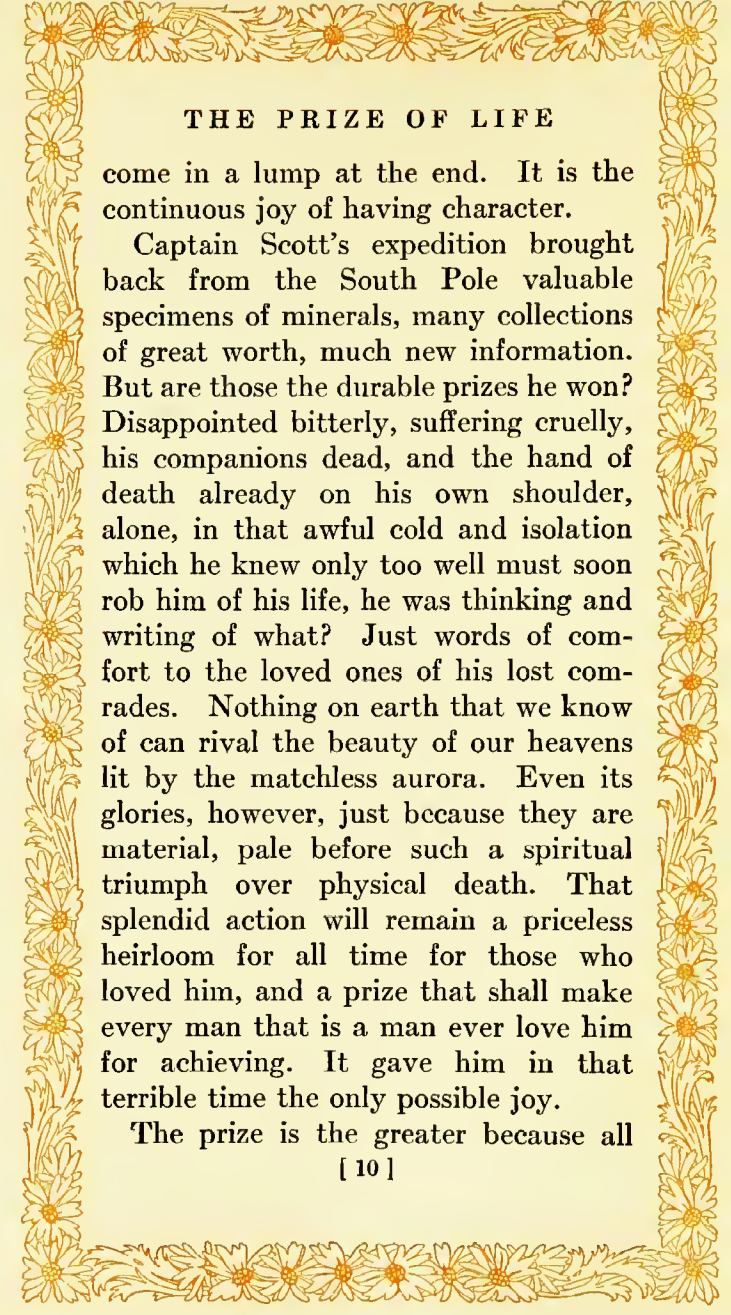
Why? That is the question. Why? Why take so tremendous a risk "for *nothing*"? After the fierce struggle was over, and the awful suspense relieved, and the common sailor was again on board, they told me that the men who had been watching cheered themselves hoarse, while the women wept for joy. Why? Again that is the question. The very cynic dare not challenge the act. Yet science did not insist on it,



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or earthly philosophy inspire it. Political and social economy might not even approve it. But every one knows it was right, and the man himself who risked his life actually wanted more such chances. For my part he made me feel jealous. I wish that his prize might have been mine.

But what was the prize? Not the opportunity, nor the immigrant's life, nor any material reward. They are all passing things. The prize was his realization that he was needed, and the supplying of that need. That is the greatest prize in the world. It is eternal. Our own souls consent that the mere mechanical doing of our absolute duty can give us no satisfaction that we are divine. The Master pronounced such lives as unprofitable. In such demonstrations that our souls, that we, are other and greater than our material bodies, we gain a glimpse of the unspeakable value of life. This is a prize that we can always and everywhere carry with us, once we have caught the vision. The prize comes with the possession of the character. It does not

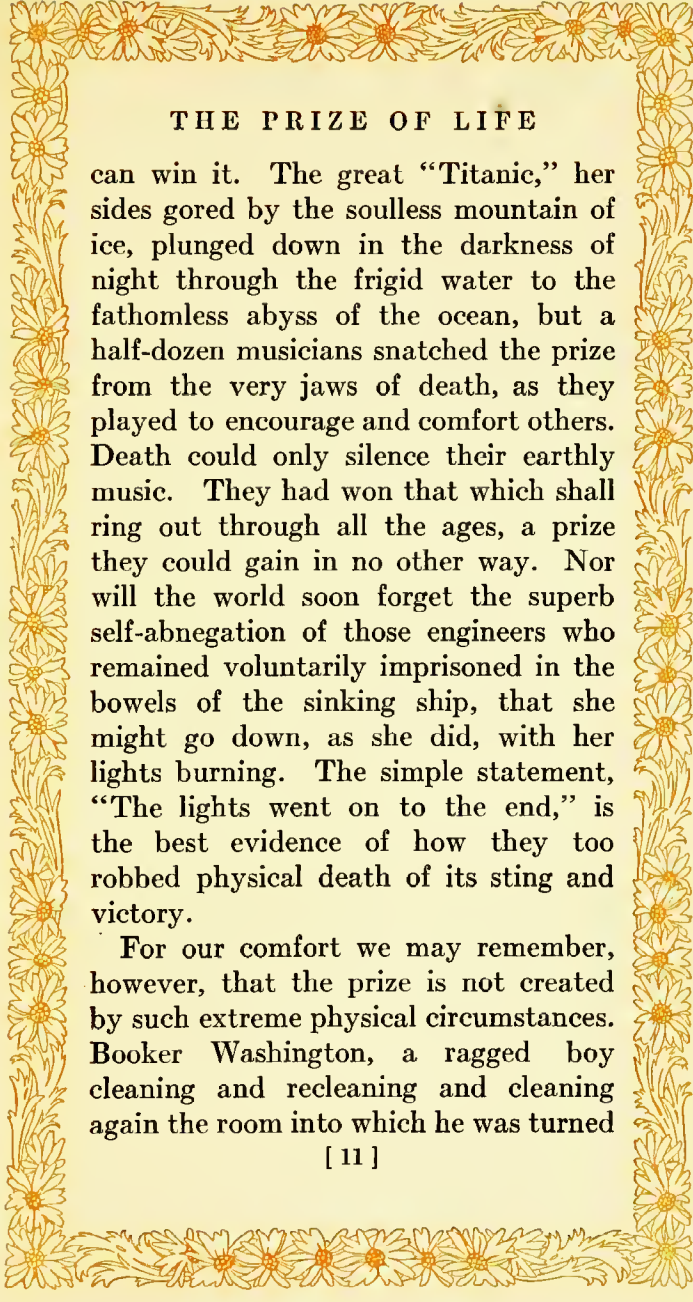


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come in a lump at the end. It is the continuous joy of having character.

Captain Scott's expedition brought back from the South Pole valuable specimens of minerals, many collections of great worth, much new information. But are those the durable prizes he won? Disappointed bitterly, suffering cruelly, his companions dead, and the hand of death already on his own shoulder, alone, in that awful cold and isolation which he knew only too well must soon rob him of his life, he was thinking and writing of what? Just words of comfort to the loved ones of his lost comrades. Nothing on earth that we know of can rival the beauty of our heavens lit by the matchless aurora. Even its glories, however, just because they are material, pale before such a spiritual triumph over physical death. That splendid action will remain a priceless heirloom for all time for those who loved him, and a prize that shall make every man that is a man ever love him for achieving. It gave him in that terrible time the only possible joy.

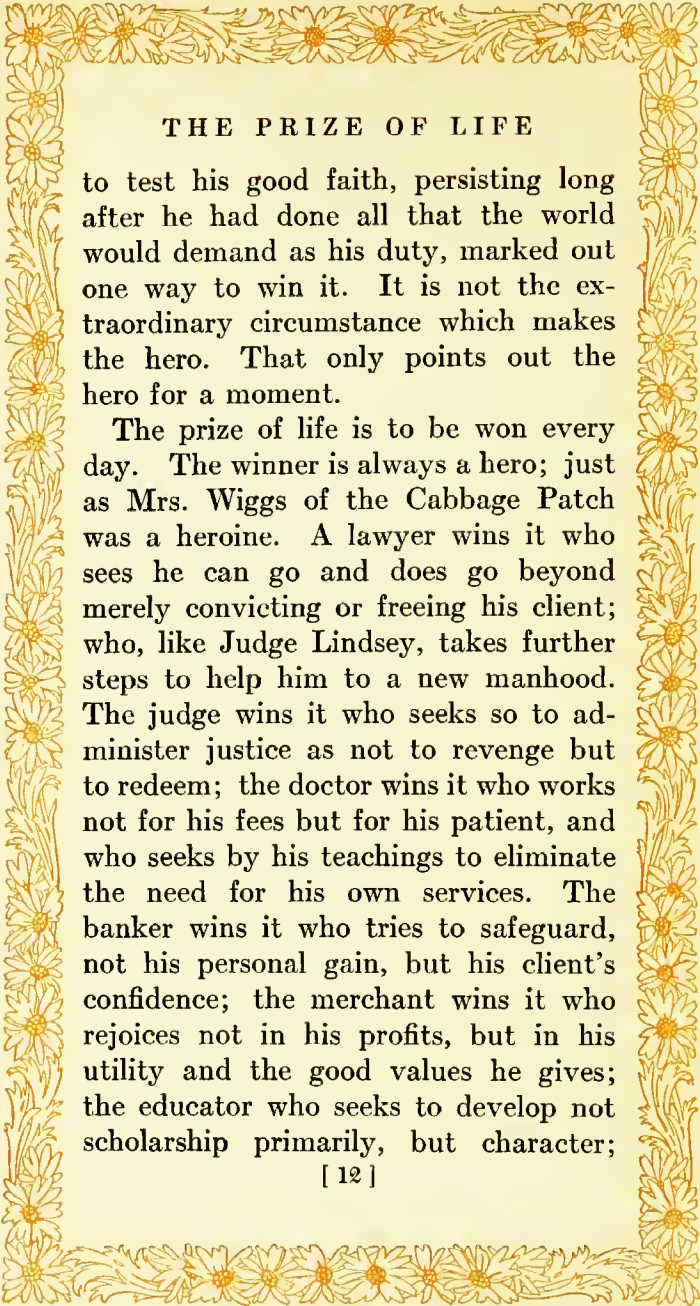
The prize is the greater because all

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can win it. The great "Titanic," her sides gored by the soulless mountain of ice, plunged down in the darkness of night through the frigid water to the fathomless abyss of the ocean, but a half-dozen musicians snatched the prize from the very jaws of death, as they played to encourage and comfort others. Death could only silence their earthly music. They had won that which shall ring out through all the ages, a prize they could gain in no other way. Nor will the world soon forget the superb self-abnegation of those engineers who remained voluntarily imprisoned in the bowels of the sinking ship, that she might go down, as she did, with her lights burning. The simple statement, "The lights went on to the end," is the best evidence of how they too robbed physical death of its sting and victory.

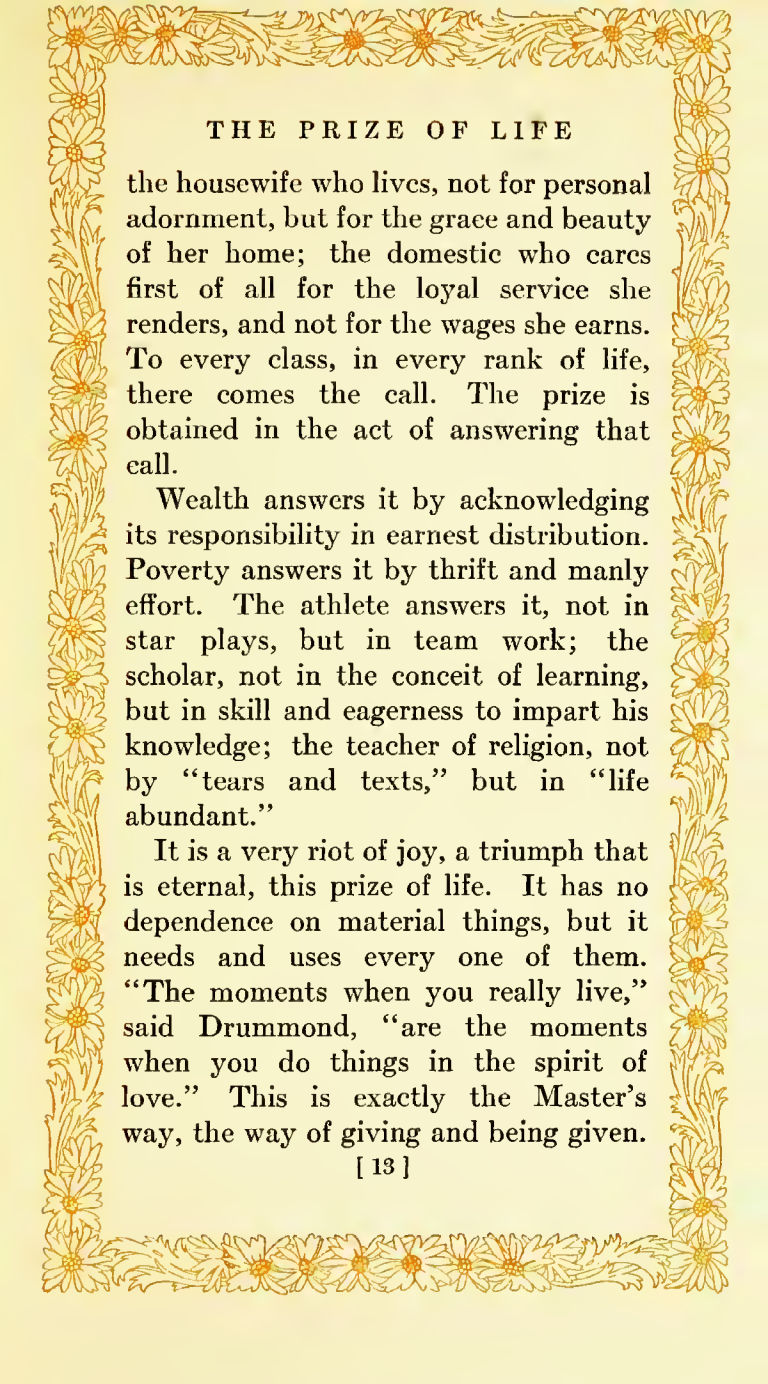
For our comfort we may remember, however, that the prize is not created by such extreme physical circumstances. Booker Washington, a ragged boy cleaning and recleaning and cleaning again the room into which he was turned

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to test his good faith, persisting long after he had done all that the world would demand as his duty, marked out one way to win it. It is not the extraordinary circumstance which makes the hero. That only points out the hero for a moment.

The prize of life is to be won every day. The winner is always a hero; just as Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch was a heroine. A lawyer wins it who sees he can go and does go beyond merely convicting or freeing his client; who, like Judge Lindsey, takes further steps to help him to a new manhood. The judge wins it who seeks so to administer justice as not to revenge but to redeem; the doctor wins it who works not for his fees but for his patient, and who seeks by his teachings to eliminate the need for his own services. The banker wins it who tries to safeguard, not his personal gain, but his client's confidence; the merchant wins it who rejoices not in his profits, but in his utility and the good values he gives; the educator who seeks to develop not scholarship primarily, but character;

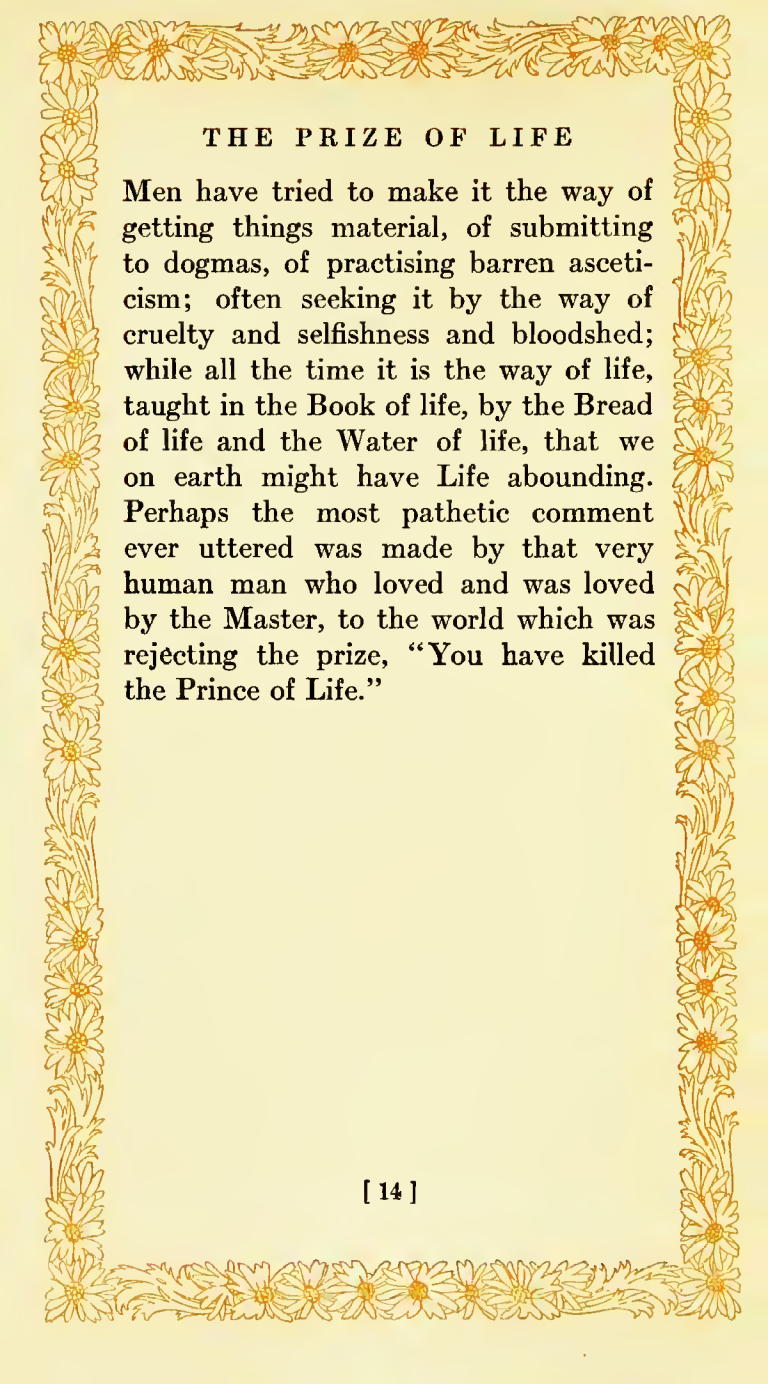
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the housewife who lives, not for personal adornment, but for the grace and beauty of her home; the domestic who cares first of all for the loyal service she renders, and not for the wages she earns. To every class, in every rank of life, there comes the call. The prize is obtained in the act of answering that call.

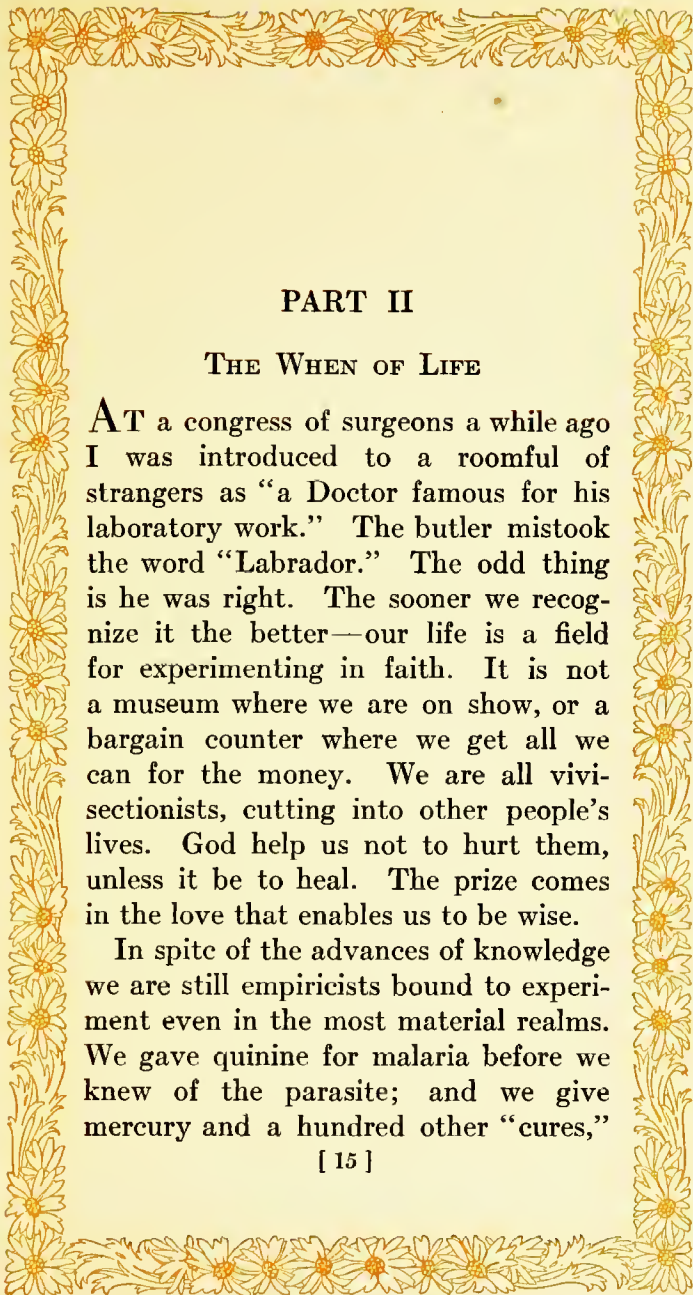
Wealth answers it by acknowledging its responsibility in earnest distribution. Poverty answers it by thrift and manly effort. The athlete answers it, not in star plays, but in team work; the scholar, not in the conceit of learning, but in skill and eagerness to impart his knowledge; the teacher of religion, not by "tears and texts," but in "life abundant."

It is a very riot of joy, a triumph that is eternal, this prize of life. It has no dependence on material things, but it needs and uses every one of them. "The moments when you really live," said Drummond, "are the moments when you do things in the spirit of love." This is exactly the Master's way, the way of giving and being given.



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Men have tried to make it the way of getting things material, of submitting to dogmas, of practising barren asceticism; often seeking it by the way of cruelty and selfishness and bloodshed; while all the time it is the way of life, taught in the Book of life, by the Bread of life and the Water of life, that we on earth might have Life abounding. Perhaps the most pathetic comment ever uttered was made by that very human man who loved and was loved by the Master, to the world which was rejecting the prize, "You have killed the Prince of Life."

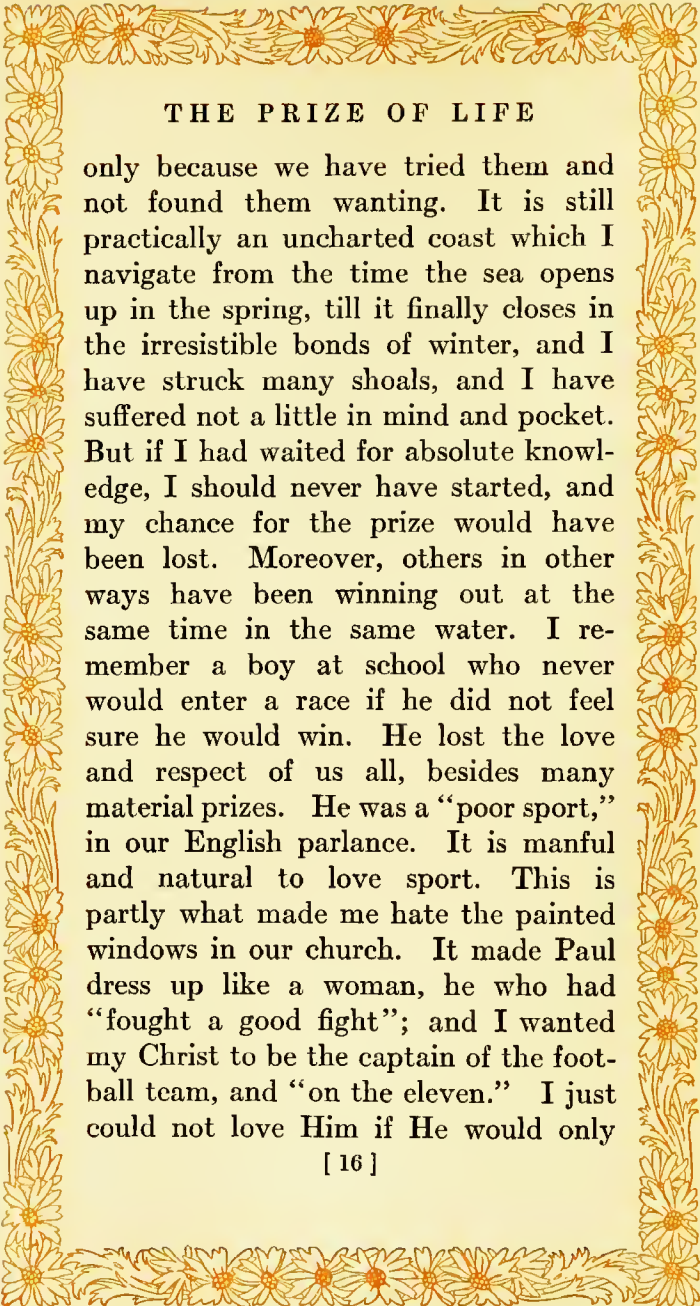


PART II

THE WHEN OF LIFE

AT a congress of surgeons a while ago I was introduced to a roomful of strangers as "a Doctor famous for his laboratory work." The butler mistook the word "Labrador." The odd thing is he was right. The sooner we recognize it the better—our life is a field for experimenting in faith. It is not a museum where we are on show, or a bargain counter where we get all we can for the money. We are all vivisectionists, cutting into other people's lives. God help us not to hurt them, unless it be to heal. The prize comes in the love that enables us to be wise.

In spite of the advances of knowledge we are still empiricists bound to experiment even in the most material realms. We gave quinine for malaria before we knew of the parasite; and we give mercury and a hundred other "cures,"



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only because we have tried them and not found them wanting. It is still practically an uncharted coast which I navigate from the time the sea opens up in the spring, till it finally closes in the irresistible bonds of winter, and I have struck many shoals, and I have suffered not a little in mind and pocket. But if I had waited for absolute knowledge, I should never have started, and my chance for the prize would have been lost. Moreover, others in other ways have been winning out at the same time in the same water. I remember a boy at school who never would enter a race if he did not feel sure he would win. He lost the love and respect of us all, besides many material prizes. He was a "poor sport," in our English parlance. It is manful and natural to love sport. This is partly what made me hate the painted windows in our church. It made Paul dress up like a woman, he who had "fought a good fight"; and I wanted my Christ to be the captain of the football team, and "on the eleven." I just could not love Him if He would only



THE DAILY JOY OF HONEST, HARD-WON VICTORY

THE PRIZE OF LIFE

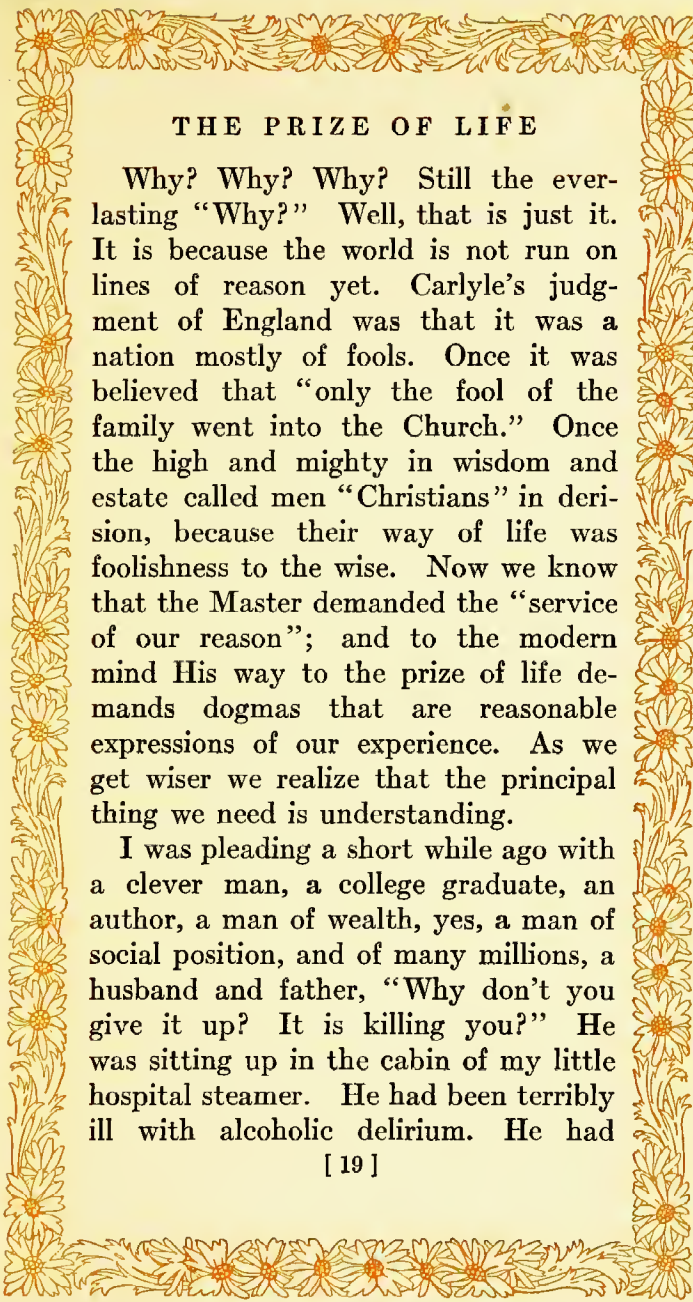
wear petticoats, and gaudy ones, all bejeweled at that. All my ideals were of real men ready for contest. The books I loved were "The Men of Action Series." The boy scout uniform appeals to every man. It suggests endurance, vigilance, readiness, ability, and self-mastery.

The glory of it all is that that is exactly the way Christ tells us to win our prize. Think of the fun of it all. Yet some call a ballet dance or a tango trot the "*joie de vivre*." It is not the "*joie*" with which I am at issue, for I have enjoyed the rightful satisfaction of physical victory. I can still feel the throb of pride that stirred me when I found myself chosen to represent my University on their football team. Every athlete knows it, and knows it is a true joy. It is the restriction of the word *vivre* to which I object. "Tears and texts; texts and tears" stood for religion, as General Baden-Powell said, he who made the world laugh at the downright fun he had in defending Mafeking against superior forces, till all the world caught it, and London

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went wild with the fever. They called it "Mafeking" instead of "Tango." The prize is the "Mafeking" in the real fight of life.

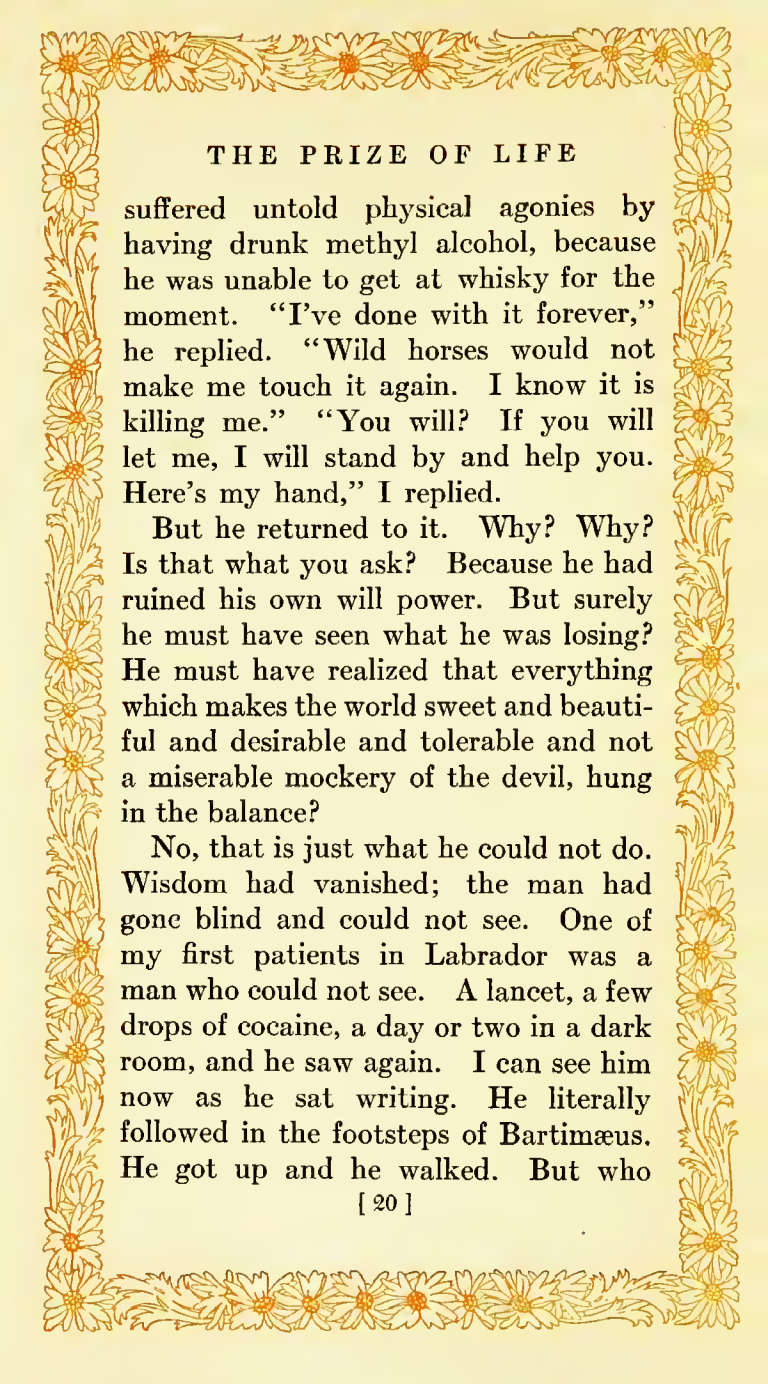
The daily joy of honest, hard-won victory. Think of it — a victory which builds up and does not destroy, which does not kill, but makes alive. Think of the awful sweetness of the prize in the winning. Only direst necessity drives men to turn into cash a trophy once won. Anyhow, you couldn't cash laurel leaves. The "Pots" on our shelves do not give us joy because of their avoirdupois of rare metals, but for the flood-gates of memories they open up. The world and General Gordon are the richer because love was the necessity that made him send to the melting-pot his great Memorial Gold Medal, to help out in the Chinese famine fund. That is Christ's way. To win we must all just "toe the line," and keep step with the Leader. But if it is all so joyful, and its satisfactions are so durable, why isn't His service already universal, why hasn't His Kingdom yet come?

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Why? Why? Why? Still the everlasting "Why?" Well, that is just it. It is because the world is not run on lines of reason yet. Carlyle's judgment of England was that it was a nation mostly of fools. Once it was believed that "only the fool of the family went into the Church." Once the high and mighty in wisdom and estate called men "Christians" in derision, because their way of life was foolishness to the wise. Now we know that the Master demanded the "service of our reason"; and to the modern mind His way to the prize of life demands dogmas that are reasonable expressions of our experience. As we get wiser we realize that the principal thing we need is understanding.

I was pleading a short while ago with a clever man, a college graduate, an author, a man of wealth, yes, a man of social position, and of many millions, a husband and father, "Why don't you give it up? It is killing you?" He was sitting up in the cabin of my little hospital steamer. He had been terribly ill with alcoholic delirium. He had

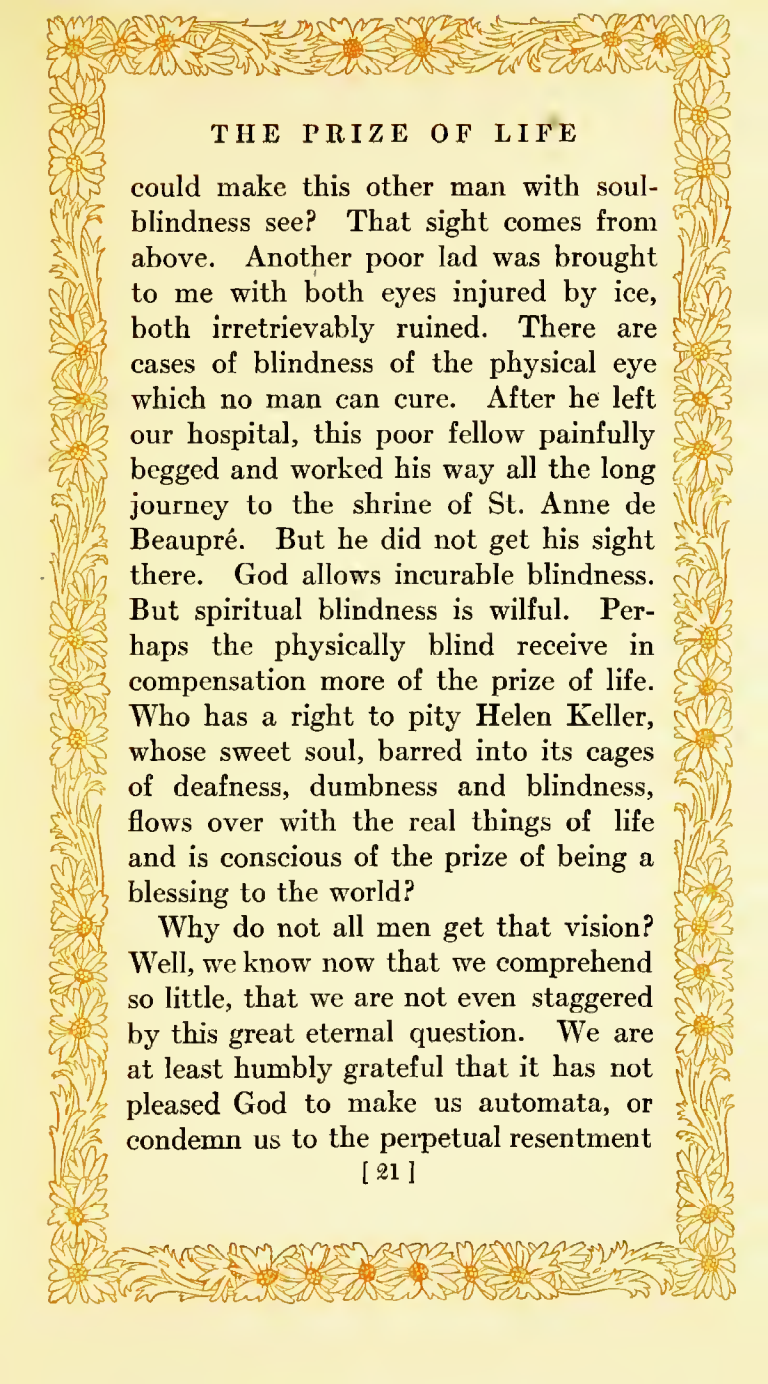


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suffered untold physical agonies by having drunk methyl alcohol, because he was unable to get at whisky for the moment. "I've done with it forever," he replied. "Wild horses would not make me touch it again. I know it is killing me." "You will? If you will let me, I will stand by and help you. Here's my hand," I replied.

But he returned to it. Why? Why? Is that what you ask? Because he had ruined his own will power. But surely he must have seen what he was losing? He must have realized that everything which makes the world sweet and beautiful and desirable and tolerable and not a miserable mockery of the devil, hung in the balance?

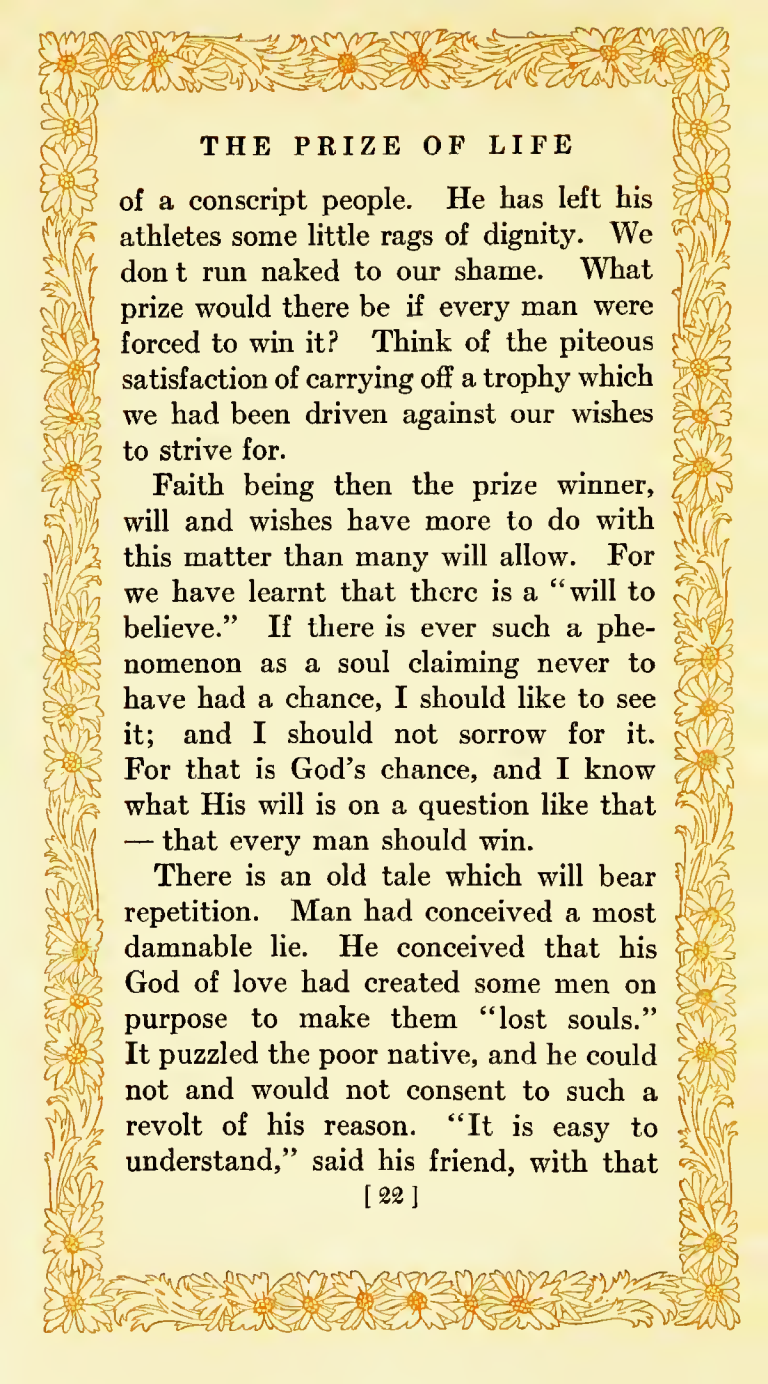
No, that is just what he could not do. Wisdom had vanished; the man had gone blind and could not see. One of my first patients in Labrador was a man who could not see. A lancet, a few drops of cocaine, a day or two in a dark room, and he saw again. I can see him now as he sat writing. He literally followed in the footsteps of Bartimæus. He got up and he walked. But who

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could make this other man with soul-blindness see? That sight comes from above. Another poor lad was brought to me with both eyes injured by ice, both irretrievably ruined. There are cases of blindness of the physical eye which no man can cure. After he left our hospital, this poor fellow painfully begged and worked his way all the long journey to the shrine of St. Anne de Beaupré. But he did not get his sight there. God allows incurable blindness. But spiritual blindness is wilful. Perhaps the physically blind receive in compensation more of the prize of life. Who has a right to pity Helen Keller, whose sweet soul, barred into its cages of deafness, dumbness and blindness, flows over with the real things of life and is conscious of the prize of being a blessing to the world?

Why do not all men get that vision? Well, we know now that we comprehend so little, that we are not even staggered by this great eternal question. We are at least humbly grateful that it has not pleased God to make us automata, or condemn us to the perpetual resentment

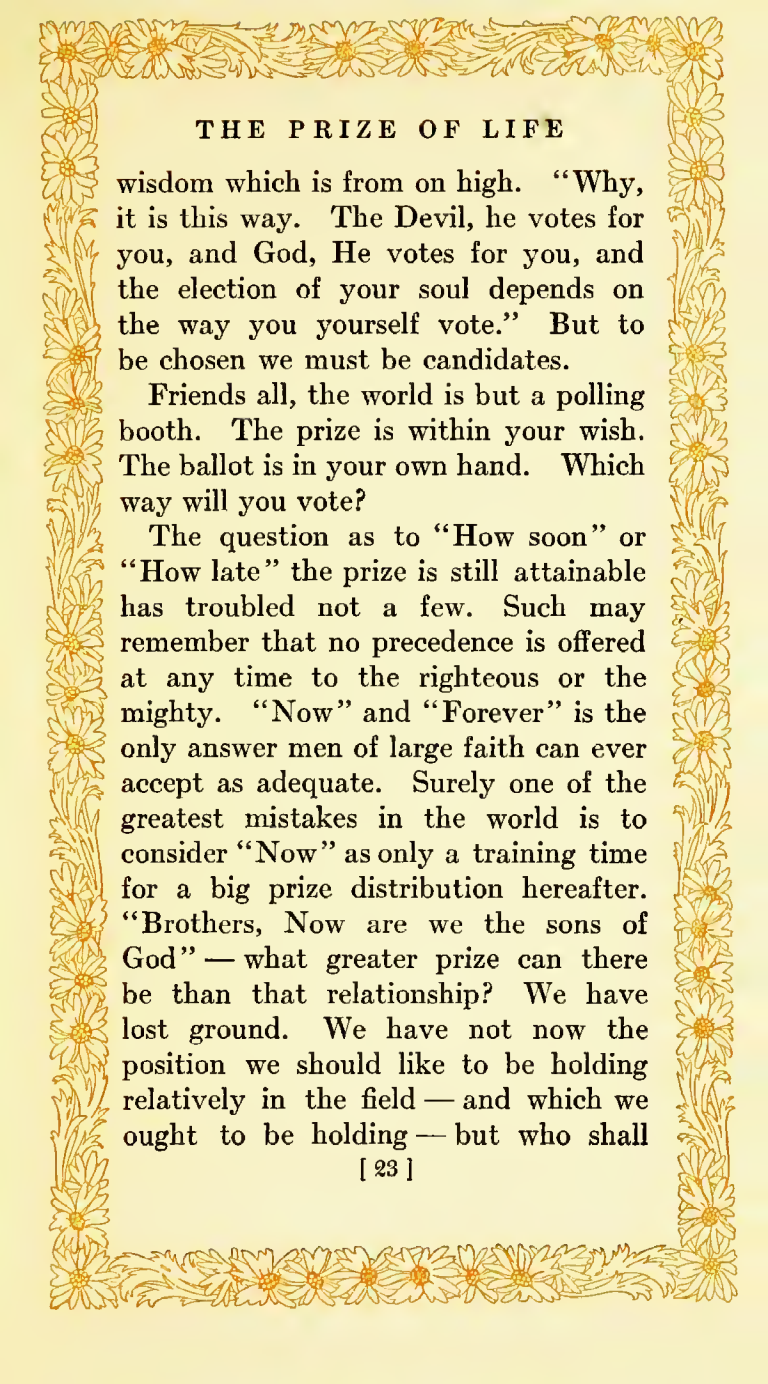


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of a conscript people. He has left his athletes some little rags of dignity. We don't run naked to our shame. What prize would there be if every man were forced to win it? Think of the piteous satisfaction of carrying off a trophy which we had been driven against our wishes to strive for.

Faith being then the prize winner, will and wishes have more to do with this matter than many will allow. For we have learnt that there is a "will to believe." If there is ever such a phenomenon as a soul claiming never to have had a chance, I should like to see it; and I should not sorrow for it. For that is God's chance, and I know what His will is on a question like that — that every man should win.

There is an old tale which will bear repetition. Man had conceived a most damnable lie. He conceived that his God of love had created some men on purpose to make them "lost souls." It puzzled the poor native, and he could not and would not consent to such a revolt of his reason. "It is easy to understand," said his friend, with that

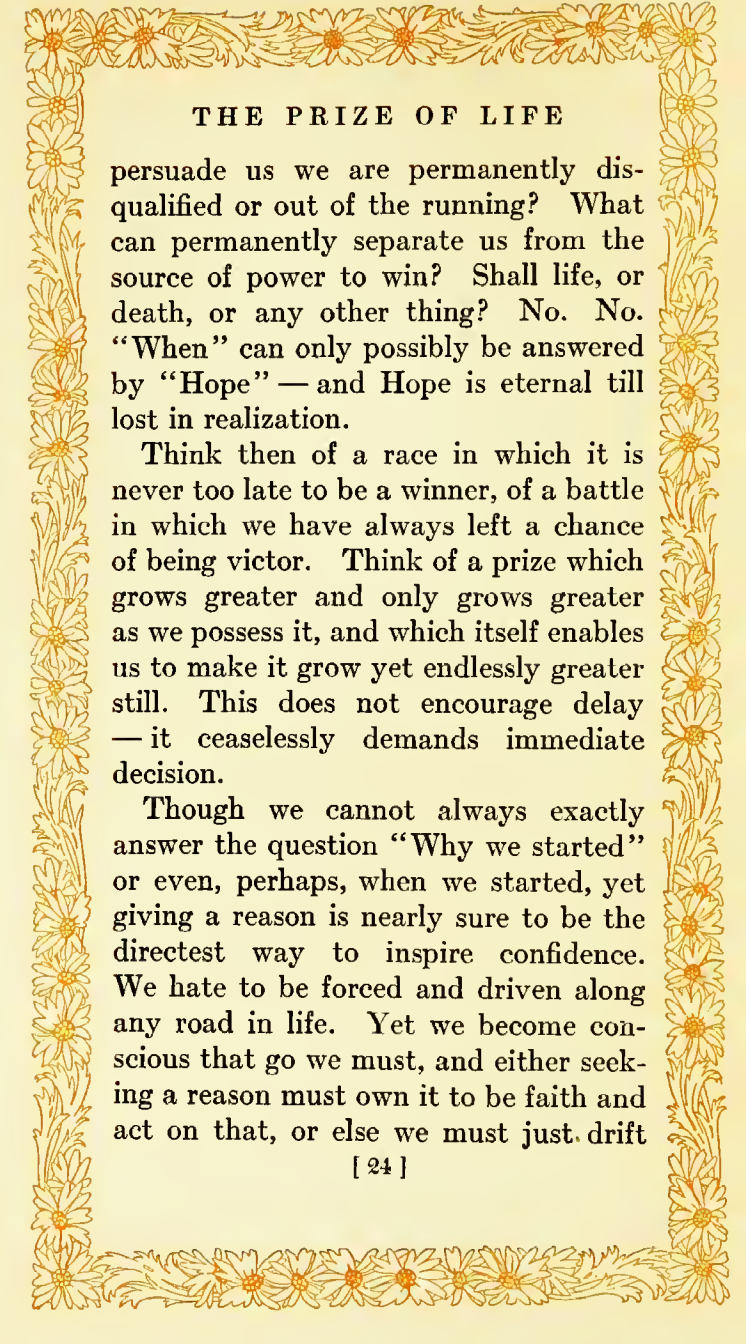
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wisdom which is from on high. "Why, it is this way. The Devil, he votes for you, and God, He votes for you, and the election of your soul depends on the way you yourself vote." But to be chosen we must be candidates.

Friends all, the world is but a polling booth. The prize is within your wish. The ballot is in your own hand. Which way will you vote?

The question as to "How soon" or "How late" the prize is still attainable has troubled not a few. Such may remember that no precedence is offered at any time to the righteous or the mighty. "Now" and "Forever" is the only answer men of large faith can ever accept as adequate. Surely one of the greatest mistakes in the world is to consider "Now" as only a training time for a big prize distribution hereafter. "Brothers, Now are we the sons of God" — what greater prize can there be than that relationship? We have lost ground. We have not now the position we should like to be holding relatively in the field — and which we ought to be holding — but who shall

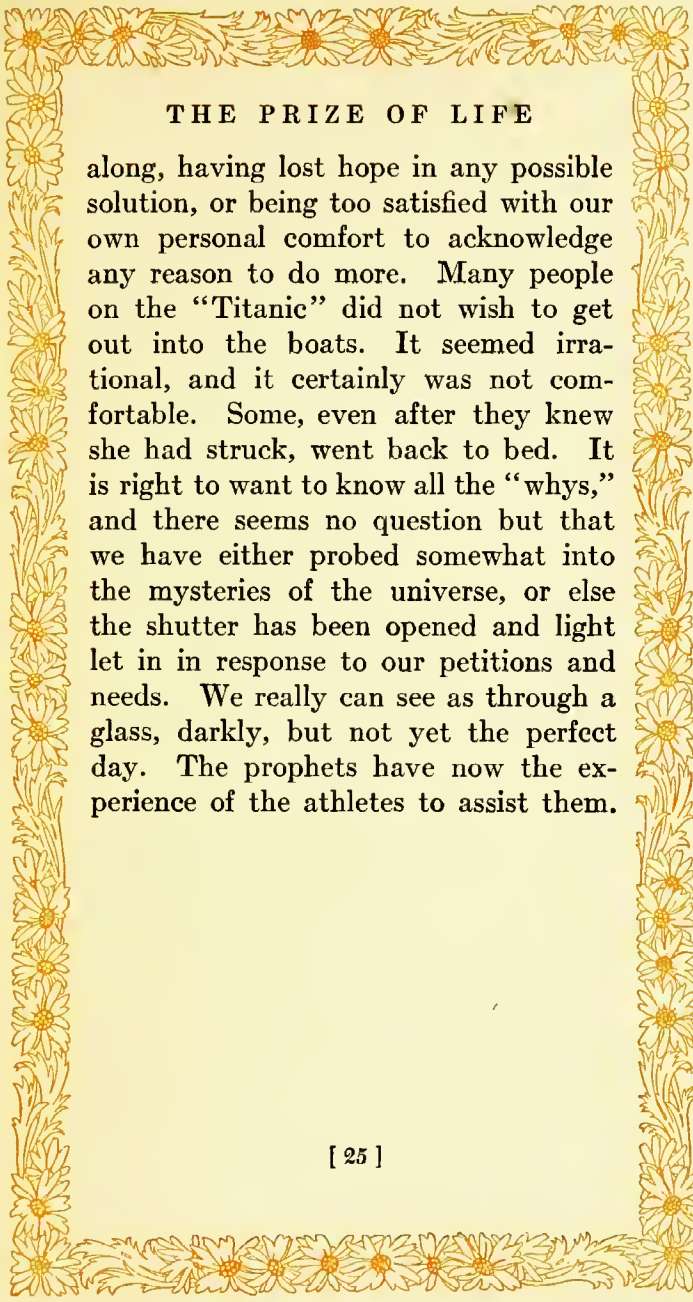
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persuade us we are permanently disqualified or out of the running? What can permanently separate us from the source of power to win? Shall life, or death, or any other thing? No. No. "When" can only possibly be answered by "Hope" — and Hope is eternal till lost in realization.

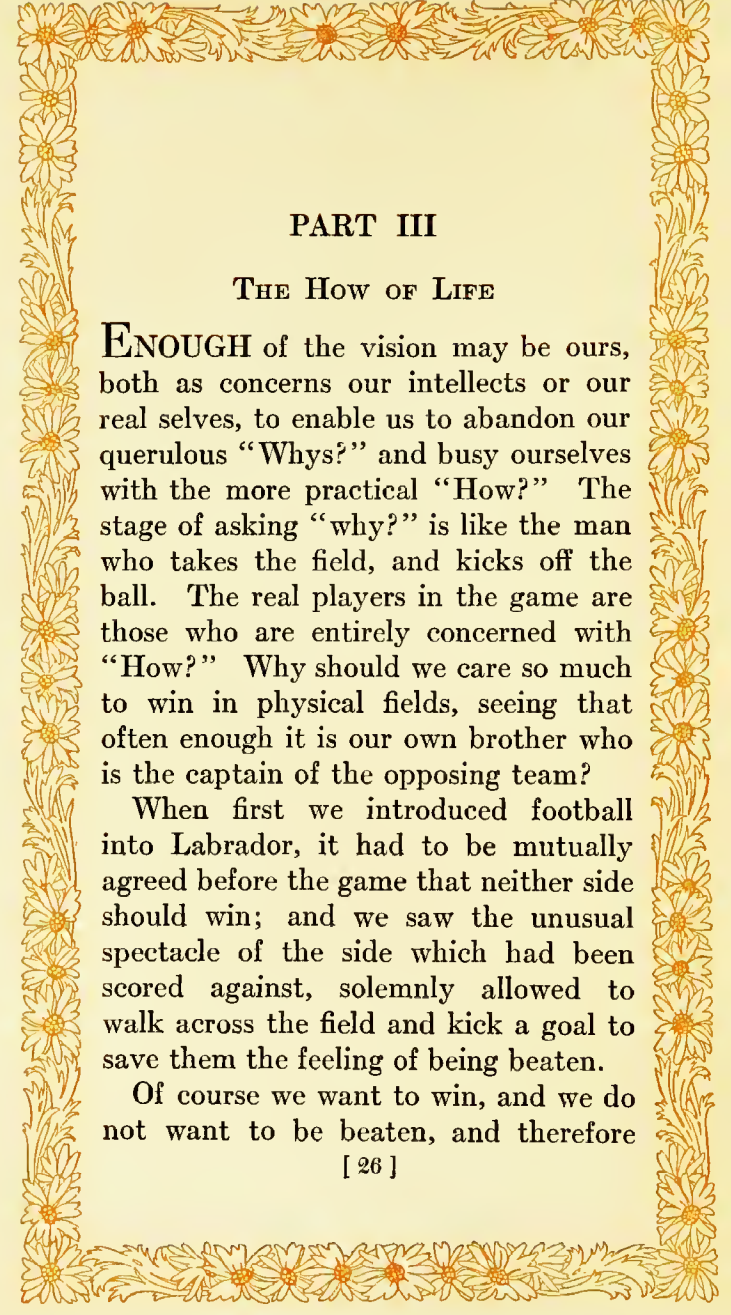
Think then of a race in which it is never too late to be a winner, of a battle in which we have always left a chance of being victor. Think of a prize which grows greater and only grows greater as we possess it, and which itself enables us to make it grow yet endlessly greater still. This does not encourage delay — it ceaselessly demands immediate decision.

Though we cannot always exactly answer the question "Why we started" or even, perhaps, when we started, yet giving a reason is nearly sure to be the directest way to inspire confidence. We hate to be forced and driven along any road in life. Yet we become conscious that go we must, and either seeking a reason must own it to be faith and act on that, or else we must just drift



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along, having lost hope in any possible solution, or being too satisfied with our own personal comfort to acknowledge any reason to do more. Many people on the "Titanic" did not wish to get out into the boats. It seemed irrational, and it certainly was not comfortable. Some, even after they knew she had struck, went back to bed. It is right to want to know all the "whys," and there seems no question but that we have either probed somewhat into the mysteries of the universe, or else the shutter has been opened and light let in in response to our petitions and needs. We really can see as through a glass, darkly, but not yet the perfect day. The prophets have now the experience of the athletes to assist them.



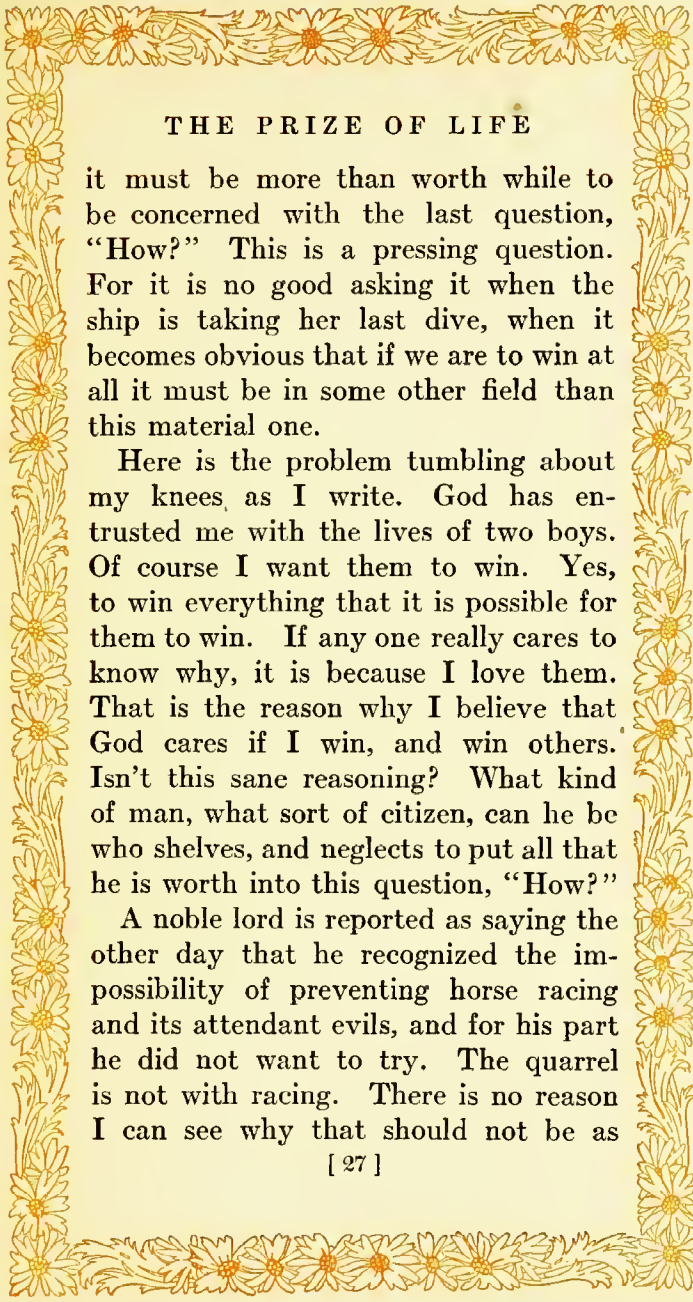
PART III

THE HOW OF LIFE

ENOUGH of the vision may be ours, both as concerns our intellects or our real selves, to enable us to abandon our querulous "Whys?" and busy ourselves with the more practical "How?" The stage of asking "why?" is like the man who takes the field, and kicks off the ball. The real players in the game are those who are entirely concerned with "How?" Why should we care so much to win in physical fields, seeing that often enough it is our own brother who is the captain of the opposing team?

When first we introduced football into Labrador, it had to be mutually agreed before the game that neither side should win; and we saw the unusual spectacle of the side which had been scored against, solemnly allowed to walk across the field and kick a goal to save them the feeling of being beaten.

Of course we want to win, and we do not want to be beaten, and therefore

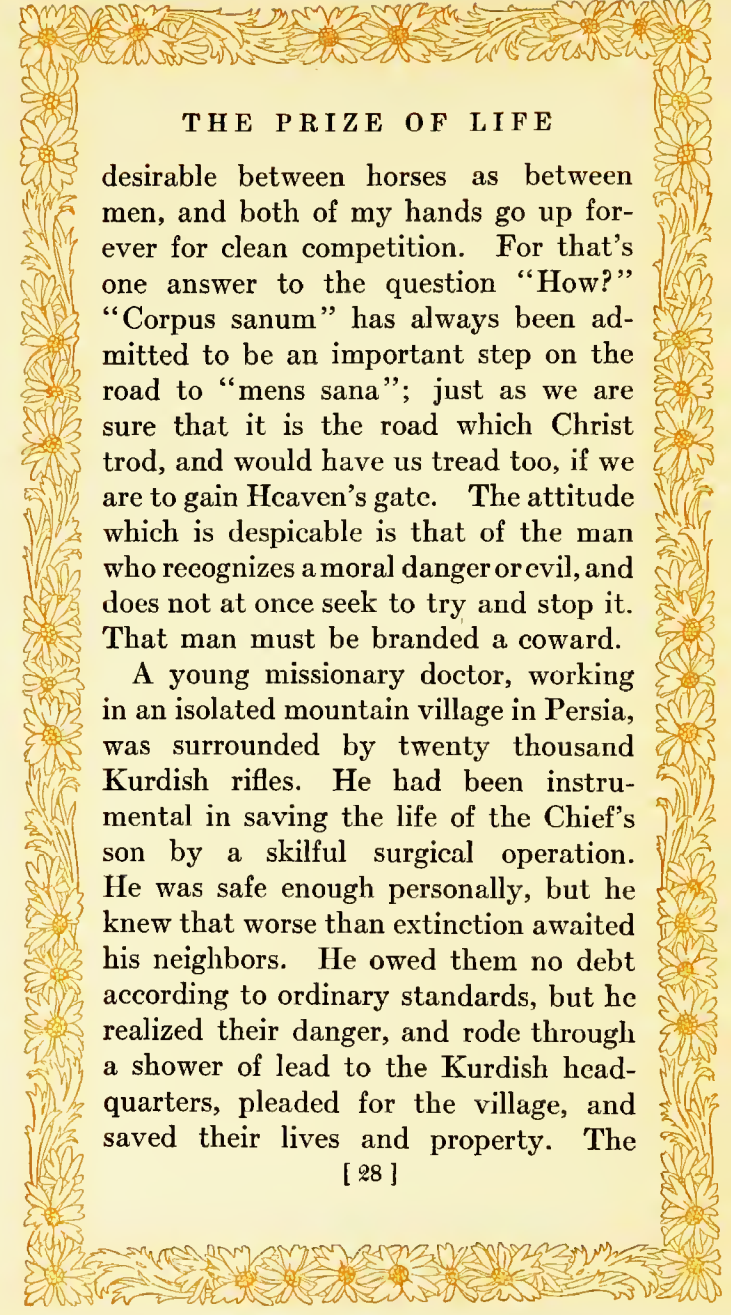


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it must be more than worth while to be concerned with the last question, "How?" This is a pressing question. For it is no good asking it when the ship is taking her last dive, when it becomes obvious that if we are to win at all it must be in some other field than this material one.

Here is the problem tumbling about my knees, as I write. God has entrusted me with the lives of two boys. Of course I want them to win. Yes, to win everything that it is possible for them to win. If any one really cares to know why, it is because I love them. That is the reason why I believe that God cares if I win, and win others. Isn't this sane reasoning? What kind of man, what sort of citizen, can he be who shelves, and neglects to put all that he is worth into this question, "How?"

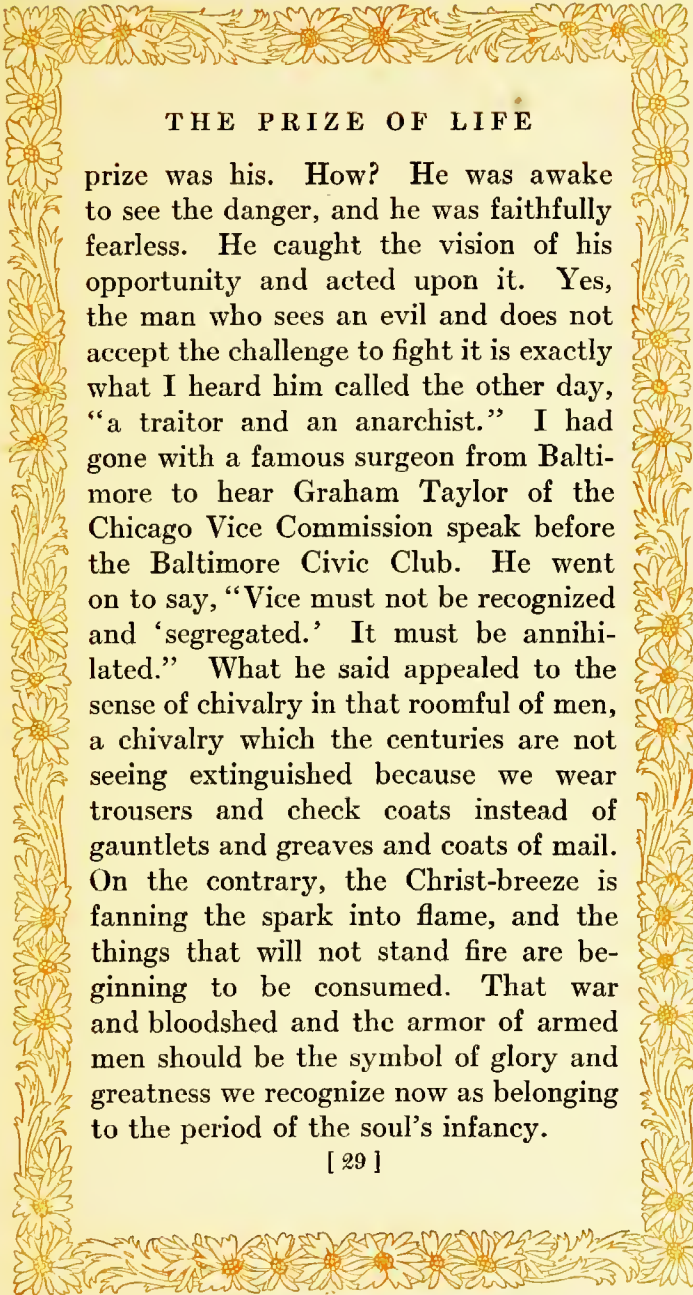
A noble lord is reported as saying the other day that he recognized the impossibility of preventing horse racing and its attendant evils, and for his part he did not want to try. The quarrel is not with racing. There is no reason I can see why that should not be as

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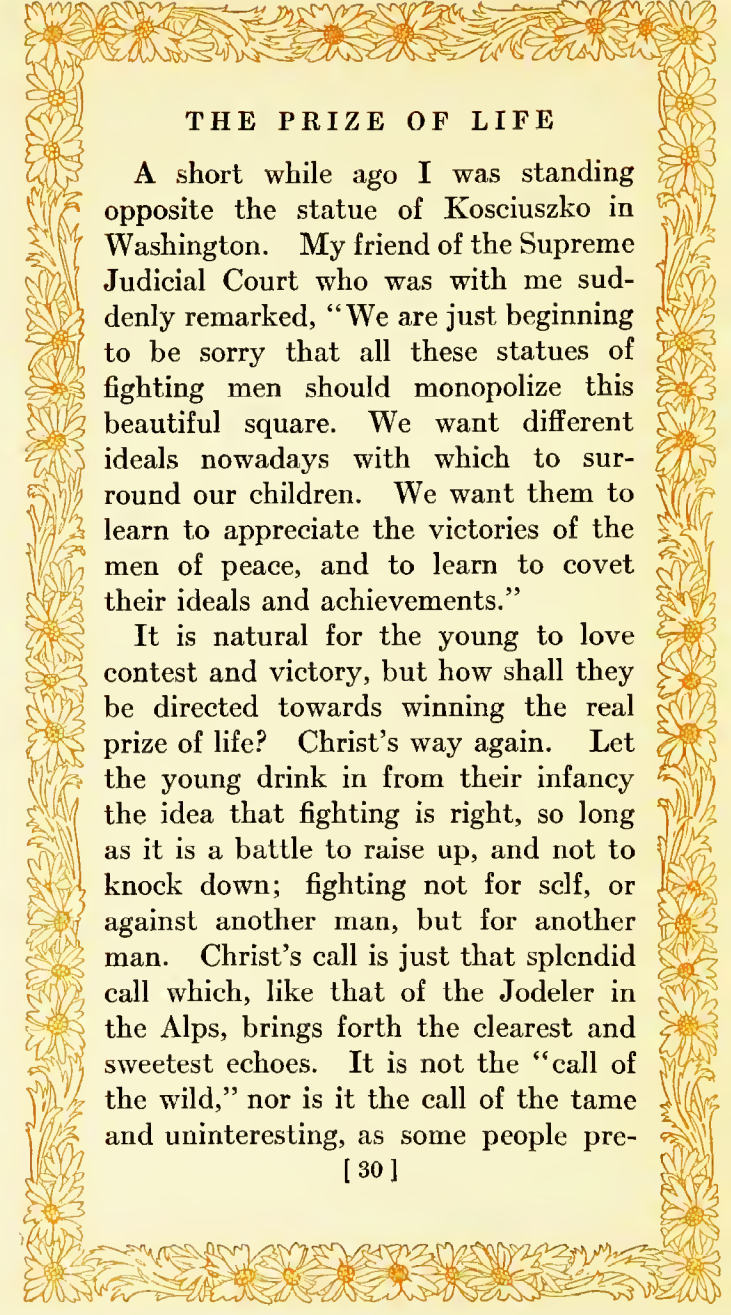
desirable between horses as between men, and both of my hands go up forever for clean competition. For that's one answer to the question "How?" "Corpus sanum" has always been admitted to be an important step on the road to "mens sana"; just as we are sure that it is the road which Christ trod, and would have us tread too, if we are to gain Heaven's gate. The attitude which is despicable is that of the man who recognizes a moral danger or evil, and does not at once seek to try and stop it. That man must be branded a coward.

A young missionary doctor, working in an isolated mountain village in Persia, was surrounded by twenty thousand Kurdish rifles. He had been instrumental in saving the life of the Chief's son by a skilful surgical operation. He was safe enough personally, but he knew that worse than extinction awaited his neighbors. He owed them no debt according to ordinary standards, but he realized their danger, and rode through a shower of lead to the Kurdish headquarters, pleaded for the village, and saved their lives and property. The

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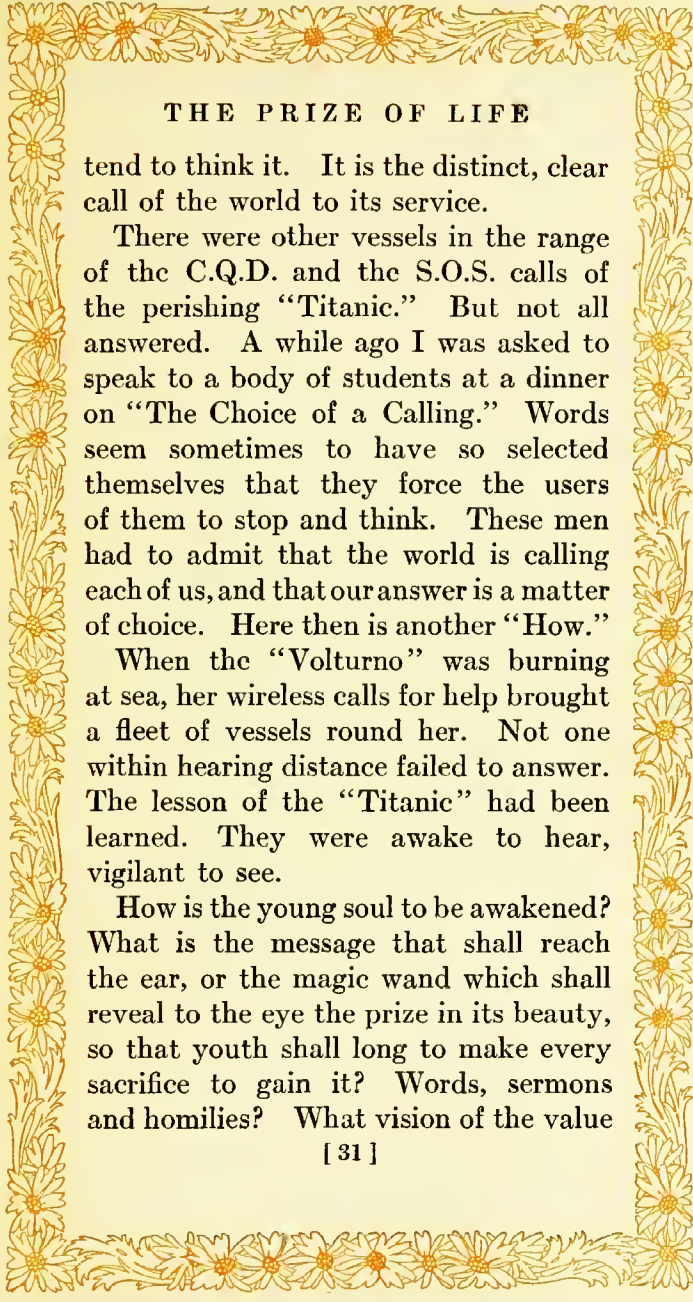
prize was his. How? He was awake to see the danger, and he was faithfully fearless. He caught the vision of his opportunity and acted upon it. Yes, the man who sees an evil and does not accept the challenge to fight it is exactly what I heard him called the other day, "a traitor and an anarchist." I had gone with a famous surgeon from Baltimore to hear Graham Taylor of the Chicago Vice Commission speak before the Baltimore Civic Club. He went on to say, "Vice must not be recognized and 'segregated.' It must be annihilated." What he said appealed to the sense of chivalry in that roomful of men, a chivalry which the centuries are not seeing extinguished because we wear trousers and check coats instead of gauntlets and greaves and coats of mail. On the contrary, the Christ-breeze is fanning the spark into flame, and the things that will not stand fire are beginning to be consumed. That war and bloodshed and the armor of armed men should be the symbol of glory and greatness we recognize now as belonging to the period of the soul's infancy.

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A short while ago I was standing opposite the statue of Kosciuszko in Washington. My friend of the Supreme Judicial Court who was with me suddenly remarked, "We are just beginning to be sorry that all these statues of fighting men should monopolize this beautiful square. We want different ideals nowadays with which to surround our children. We want them to learn to appreciate the victories of the men of peace, and to learn to covet their ideals and achievements."

It is natural for the young to love contest and victory, but how shall they be directed towards winning the real prize of life? Christ's way again. Let the young drink in from their infancy the idea that fighting is right, so long as it is a battle to raise up, and not to knock down; fighting not for self, or against another man, but for another man. Christ's call is just that splendid call which, like that of the Jodeler in the Alps, brings forth the clearest and sweetest echoes. It is not the "call of the wild," nor is it the call of the tame and uninteresting, as some people pre-

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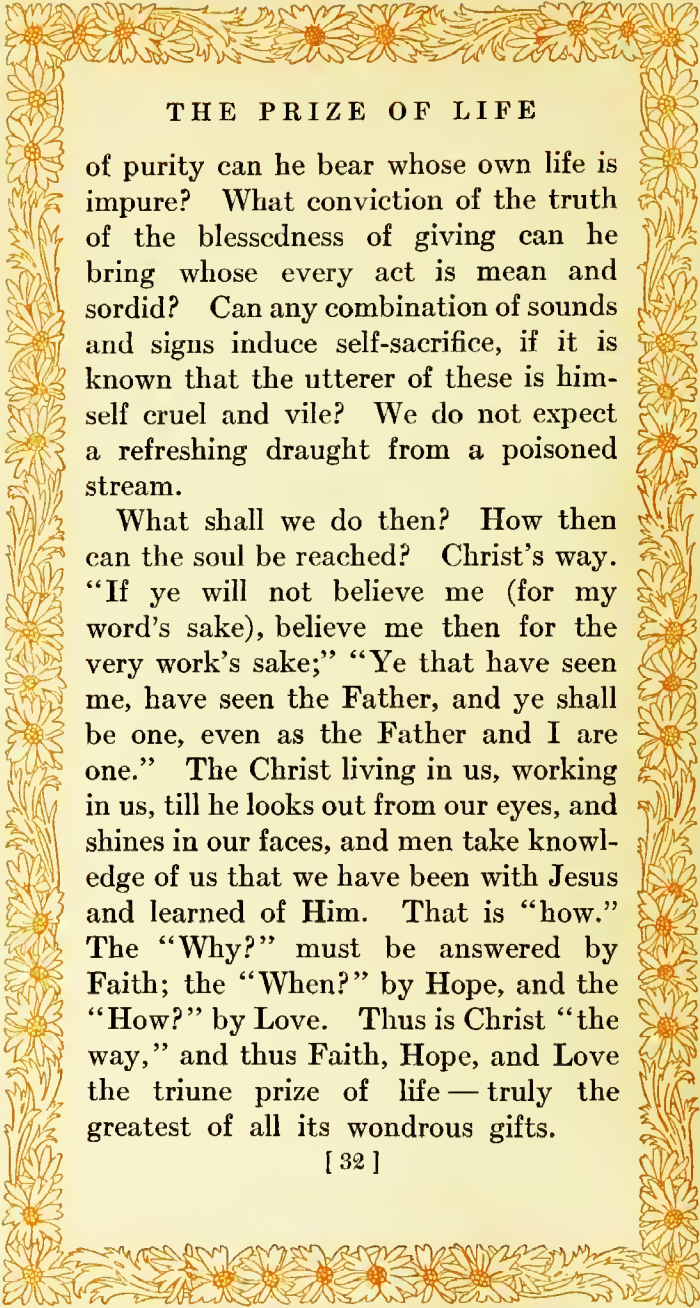
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tend to think it. It is the distinct, clear call of the world to its service.

There were other vessels in the range of the C.Q.D. and the S.O.S. calls of the perishing "Titanic." But not all answered. A while ago I was asked to speak to a body of students at a dinner on "The Choice of a Calling." Words seem sometimes to have so selected themselves that they force the users of them to stop and think. These men had to admit that the world is calling each of us, and that our answer is a matter of choice. Here then is another "How."

When the "Vultarno" was burning at sea, her wireless calls for help brought a fleet of vessels round her. Not one within hearing distance failed to answer. The lesson of the "Titanic" had been learned. They were awake to hear, vigilant to see.

How is the young soul to be awakened? What is the message that shall reach the ear, or the magic wand which shall reveal to the eye the prize in its beauty, so that youth shall long to make every sacrifice to gain it? Words, sermons and homilies? What vision of the value

A decorative border of stylized yellow flowers with green leaves surrounds the text.

THE PRIZE OF LIFE

of purity can he bear whose own life is impure? What conviction of the truth of the blessedness of giving can he bring whose every act is mean and sordid? Can any combination of sounds and signs induce self-sacrifice, if it is known that the utterer of these is himself cruel and vile? We do not expect a refreshing draught from a poisoned stream.

What shall we do then? How then can the soul be reached? Christ's way. "If ye will not believe me (for my word's sake), believe me then for the very work's sake;" "Ye that have seen me, have seen the Father, and ye shall be one, even as the Father and I are one." The Christ living in us, working in us, till he looks out from our eyes, and shines in our faces, and men take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus and learned of Him. That is "how." The "Why?" must be answered by Faith; the "When?" by Hope, and the "How?" by Love. Thus is Christ "the way," and thus Faith, Hope, and Love the triune prize of life — truly the greatest of all its wondrous gifts.

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Prize of life, by Wilfred T. Grenfell, M



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